

COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF EMPLOYEES AT A THEME PARK IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Communication satisfaction has received considerable attention in the past twenty years; however, there is a paucity of the communication research in the hospitality industry. Employees at one of the theme parks in China were selected to assess the relationships among communication satisfaction (CS), job satisfaction (JS) and organizational commitment (OC), using updated Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire. The results demonstrated that (1) all of the sub-dimensions of CS were significant on JS except for communication climate (CC); (2) JS was significant on all the sub-dimensions of CS. A conclusion could be drawn that hospitality managers enhancing the communication satisfaction will enjoy a higher job satisfaction and increased organization commitment.

Keywords: *communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, communication satisfaction questionnaire*

INTRODUCTION

Communication satisfaction has received considerable attention in the past twenty years. Understanding communication satisfaction can provide an ability to better improve overall job satisfaction. Pettit et al. (1997) called for further research in the field focusing on the relationships between organizational communication and other organizational outcomes. The Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) (Downs & Hazen, 1977) is one of the most comprehensive instruments. The usefulness of the CSQ is enhanced by being relatively easy to administer, and respondents need to spend only a short amount of time to complete it.

Although numerous researchers have reviewed the important role of communication satisfaction in the organizational behavior, there is a paucity of the communication research in the hospitality industry. Due to the unique aspects of labor in the hospitality industry being emotional labor, the effect of communication satisfaction on overall employee job satisfaction and other organizational behavior may be substantial (Mount & Back, 1999).

Thus, the primary objective of this research is to assess the relationships among communication satisfaction (CS), job satisfaction (JS), and organizational commitment (OC) in the hospitality industry. The result of this study should provide practical values for identifying the key areas to improve employees' overall job satisfaction and commitment level.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Communication Satisfaction (CS) and Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ)

Traditionally, communication satisfaction (CS) was thought to be a unidimensional construct. Wiio (1976) came up with the four dimensions of CS: job satisfaction, message content, improvements in communication, and channel efficiency. Thayer (1986) defined communication satisfaction as the personal satisfaction inherent in successfully communicating to someone or in successfully being communicated with.

After investigating the communication satisfaction questions, Downs and Hazen (1977) developed the CSQ and applied it to 225 employees from different organizations. The results were factor-analyzed, and a new questionnaire was refined and administered to four different organizations. Factor analysis led to the identification of eight stable dimensions of communication satisfaction.

Job Satisfaction (JS)

Job satisfaction (JS) has been one of the most intensely recognized and studied areas in organizational behavior research (Heskett, et al, 1994). Locke (1976) defined it as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. In the hospitality industry, job satisfaction helps to ensure that employees will treat customers with the utmost respect (Arnett et al., 2002).

Organizational Commitment (OC)

Organizational commitment (OC) is loyalty to the organization and mobilization of all employees in the development of its goals, purposes, and infrastructure (Lee et al., 1999). The three themes were originally identified by Meyer and Allen (1991), and they are: "affective commitment", "continuance commitment" and "normative commitment". Generally speaking, the employees with an affective commitment remain because they want to, with a continuance commitment because they need to, and with strong normative commitment because they ought to.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Pettit et al. (1997) investigated organizational communication as a mediator of the association between job performance and job satisfaction. According to Korte and Wynne (1996), a deterioration of relationships in organizational settings resulting from reduced interpersonal communication between workers and supervisors negatively influences job satisfaction. According to their review of relevant research, Gray and Laidlaw (2004) demonstrated that communication satisfaction has been linked with other important organizational communication outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Job satisfaction has positive association with organizational commitment. Empirical evidence suggested that job satisfaction is an antecedent to organizational commitment (Brown and Peterson, 1994). If employees are morally committed to an organization, the following can

be expected: increased likelihood of retention, consistent attendance, and increased productivity (McNeese-Smith, 1995).

This research proposed communication satisfaction as a predictor of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Furthermore, job satisfaction plays as a mediator. To examine the relationship among the three variables, this investigation tests the following three hypotheses:

- H1:** Communication Satisfaction (CS) has a positive effect on Job Satisfaction (JS).
- H2:** Communication Satisfaction (CS) has a positive effect on Organizational Commitment (OC).
- H3:** Job Satisfaction (JS) has a positive effect on Organization Commitment (OC).

METHODOLOGY

Measurements

The original Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (Downs & Hazen, 2004, pp143-145) was modified by hospitality educators and experts to be more applicable to the selected theme park. The updated questionnaire has 70 items. 47 items asked about the employees' communication satisfactions. "My supervisor is open to ideas." is an example. 17 items were asked about the employees' organizational commitment. One example could be "I owe a great deal to my organization." 3 items were used to assess employees' job satisfaction. For example, "How satisfied are you with your job?" The seven point Likert-scale was used to measure all variables, ranging from "Satisfied" to "Dissatisfied" or "Agreed" to "Disagreed". The questionnaire included several demographic questions as well, such as "What is your gender?"

Sample and Data Collection

Employees at one of the theme parks in China were selected to test this study. The selected theme park opened in July, 2006 and is the biggest theme park in northeastern part of China. It has more than 350 employees working in 14 departments, including a hotel. 266 questionnaires were distributed to employees at the monthly employee meeting. 190 questionnaires were collected and used, resulting in a 74.81% responding rate.

Data Analysis

First, factor analysis was conducted to understand the underlying structure of each latent variable. Specifically, CS and OC had multiple underlying dimensions. After principle component analysis with Varimax rotation, 42 communication satisfaction items were extracted into 3 factors, which accounted for 65.10% of the total variance and 17 organizational commitment items into 3 factors, which accounted for 66.20% of the total variance. A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess the hypothesized relationship among CS, JS and OC. Specifically, the mediating role of JS was investigated by the mediation analysis.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Factor analysis helped to find out three factors of CS, one factor of JS and three factors of OC. The three factors of CS are Organization Integration (OI), Corporate and Personal Perspective (CPP) and Communication Climate (CC). The three factors of OC were Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC), Instrumental Organizational Commitment (IOC) and Emotional Organizational Commitment (EOC). Furthermore, all of the research hypotheses were supported by conducting a series of multiple regressions except for the effect of Communication Climate (CC) on JS ($\beta_{CC} = .08$).

This study accomplished all of the variables that were previously discussed. The findings of statistical analyses supported the conceptualized model in this study. The key findings are summarized as follows:

1. All of the sub-dimensions of CS were significant on JS ($\beta_{OI} = .42$, $\beta_{CPP} = .26$) except for Communication Climate ($\beta_{CC} = .08$). It may be because employees did not much consider the effect of hearsay/grapevine on their communication satisfaction, which will further influence their overall job satisfaction.
2. JS was significant on all the sub-dimensions of OC ($\beta_{AOC} = .57$, $\beta_{IOC} = .31$, $\beta_{EOC} = .42$). It may be because when employees have a higher satisfaction on their jobs, they will have a stronger sense of “belonging” to the property and feel like a real part of the organization.

The findings of this study provide several managerial implications for hospitality industry. First, managers and supervisor should realize the important role of organizational integration to increase employee's job satisfaction and organizational commitment. For instance, the supervisors should be reachable and open to ideas. Second, managers should better understand the employees' personal perspective to reach a higher organizational commitment. Third, decreased communication satisfaction and job satisfaction lead to a lower organizational commitment. Specialized communication trainings should be scheduled throughout the property.

There are several limitations associated with this study. First, due to the limited sample size and the data being collected in a foreign country, the result may not be generalized to U.S. or other countries' hospitality industry. Second, this study did not consider that “culture” may play as an important role in employees' communication satisfaction. Third, employees working at theme park may differ from those from other segments.

However, the results of this study provide a basic idea for related organization communication satisfaction studies and encourage further focused research. It is recommended to conduct similar surveys in multiple hospitality properties throughout China or other countries. Furthermore, the ongoing studies could take more variables into consideration, such as turnover intention, service quality and customer satisfaction. Last but not least, future studies could apply the proposed model and results of study to other research fields.

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